

## **Joint Meeting**

**House Committee on Natural Resources, House Committee on Tourism, Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Environment and Great Lakes, Senate Committee on Outdoor Recreation and Tourism**

**February 18, 2014**

**Prepared Statement by U.S. Rep. Candice S. Miller**

Chairman LaFontaine, Pettalia, Caperson, Hansen:

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to present a prepared statement for this joint meeting regarding aquatic invasive species and the Great Lakes Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLRMIS). This is an issue I have been engaged in since my days as a local elected official and have continued to be a staunch advocate during my time in Congress. It is an extremely relevant and timely issue and I applaud your committees for taking the initiative to address it.

Last month, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) released a long-awaited report to Congress on options for dealing with the threat posed to the Great Lakes by invasive species - most significantly, by aggressive and destructive Asian Carp advancing on Lake Michigan through a Chicago-area system of canals. The GLMRIS report was originally authorized in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 and accelerated through MAP-21, the Surface Transportation Act passed in 2012.

The final report released identifies eight alternatives to address this issue, including permanently separating the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal from Lake Michigan – a key pathway for Asian carp. Any of these alternatives would require Congressional authorization. The Corps is to be commended for clarifying what has long been understood by those of us who cherish the Lakes - that truly protecting them will be a massive and expensive undertaking. It is now up to us - elected representatives - to summon the political will necessary to implement a solution that will preserve our most vital natural resource and the largest source of surface freshwater reserves on the planet.

Invasive species, particularly Asian carp, threaten to destroy a \$7 billion Great Lakes fishing industry. Because the study has taken many years to complete, we find ourselves in an extremely dire situation with the livelihood of our fisheries, waters, economy and way of life at stake. There is a sense of urgency now more than ever with preventing the introduction of Asian carp into the Great Lakes and I am disappointed that the GLMRIS report does not go far enough to address that. We must take this threat seriously now because once Asian carp makes its way into the Great Lakes Basin it would be extremely costly, if not impossible, to permanently eradicate. In fact, a 2012 study by Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans found that it would take as few as 10 male and 10 female Asian carp to establish a reproducing population in the Great Lakes. The cost of inaction would be devastating to the ecosystem and it would change the economic and social dynamics of the Great Lakes.

I believe the only solution at this time is to permanently separate the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal from Lake Michigan. A permanent separation is the only way to assuredly prevent the introduction of Asian carp into the Great Lakes. This is why I have introduced H.R. 4001, the Defending Against Aquatic Invasive Species Act of 2014. This bill would authorize the Corps to separate the Great Lakes

and Mississippi River Basins in order to permanently prevent against the intrusion of Asian carp and other destructive species. This bill does this by providing aggressive timelines and instructing the Corps to consult with interested stakeholders in order to ensure this is an inclusive process.

GLMRIS estimates that complete separation of the two watersheds could cost almost \$20 billion dollars and take approximately 25 years. There are other experts who provide a significantly lower estimate. The bottom line, however, is that this will be an expensive endeavor but one whose time is long overdue. This is not only a Great Lakes problem but it is also a national problem. The national impact of inaction, and the existential threat it poses to the Great Lakes, is incalculable.

This solution is not without controversy. Opponents will argue that separating the watersheds will be detrimental to the billion dollar shipping industry that relies on the Lakes. However, I would like to point out that even Illinois Governor Pat Quinn, a once vocal opponent of hydrologic separation, has expressed support for such a proposal. During a meeting of the Council of Great Lakes Governors in June 2013, Governor Quinn stated: "Ultimately, I think we have to separate the basins...I really feel that is the ultimate solution." This change in position demonstrates the increasing concern from all opinions on the spectrum that keeping Asian carp from overrunning into the Great Lakes starts with making difficult decisions.

The hydrologic separation of the Great Lakes Basin and the Mississippi River Basin would not only help prevent the spread of Asian carp, but it would also help remedy the problem of historic low water levels witnessed as of late in the Great Lakes. Since 1900, water has been diverted from Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes system to Chicago, Illinois for a variety of reasons. Diversion of the Lake Michigan waters has varied substantially over the years and has been the source of controversy, including a case before the U.S. Supreme Court and a subsequent consent decree with the State of Michigan. Under the consent decree, Illinois was limited to diverting no more than 3,200 cubic feet of water per second each year. In 1995, a dispute arose between Michigan and Illinois because more water was being diverted than permitted in the consent decree. Further inquiries found that Illinois was exceeding the agreed upon amount by nearly 15%. While Illinois did take actions to remedy this situation, it is concerning that almost five years has passed since an accounting of the water diversion. Without timely accounting, it is difficult to ensure transparency and accountability in a process that has endured controversy in the past. This is yet one more reason to implement strict hydrologic separation mechanisms.

For far too long, the citizens of the Great Lakes have stood by patiently waiting for the Corps and other bureaucratic entities to conduct study after study on how best to manage Asian carp and other important environmental issues. The time has come for the studies to turn into actions – but they must be reasonable, results-oriented actions. GLMRIS takes a step in that direction but it does not go far enough. I encourage your committees to work with me and the rest of Congress towards a solution that will protect our treasured waters in the Great Lakes.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to present a prepared statement. I look forward to working with you as we move forward on this important issue for our state and the nation.